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### **Boozman Bulletin: Battling Invisible Wounds of War**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates 22 veterans commit suicide every day. This trend is tragic and unacceptable. It is our responsibility to provide the necessary, life-saving mental health resources for the men and women who honorably wear our nation's uniform in defense of our freedoms. As a member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, my colleagues and I are working to fully understand the scope of mental illness in our veteran community. One thing is clear; VA lacks the personnel, services and proper tools to help veterans facing mental illness struggles.

In testimony before the VA Committee last year, Susan Selke shared the story of her son's struggle with mental illness including obstacles he encountered to getting VA treatment. Her son, Marine Corps veteran Clay Hunt who earned a Purple Heart in Iraq, committed suicide in 2011.

Congress has an opportunity to deliver help to veterans living with mental illness. This can be accomplished by honoring the memory of Hunt and other veterans whose struggle with mental illness by supporting *The Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (SAV) Act*.

This legislation would improve mental health care and suicide prevention resources for veterans by increasing access to mental health programs, providing incentives to recruit and retain psychiatrists to treat veterans and enhancing resources for members of the military transitioning to civilian life. In addition to providing increased access, the legislation also requires VA to evaluate its mental health programs using metrics common to mental health practitioners in order to determine which programs are successful and which

are not. This will help VA more efficiently use the taxpayer funding it receives to support the programs most beneficial to our veterans.

There are also a number of non-profit mental health organizations that are doing great work for our veterans but have struggled to gain the cooperation of VA in their efforts because of outdated laws. That will no longer be the case. This legislation gives the VA Secretary authority to cooperate and share resources with non-profit mental health organizations working to prevent veteran suicides.

Our veterans should never face an uphill battle to get the care they earned. On Wednesday, the Senate VA Committee met for the first order of business in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress – approving this bill with a bipartisan vote of 15-0. Our veterans deserve this care. That's why I cosponsored this legislation. The House approved this bill last week and I'm confident the Senate will follow its lead. It is my hope that Congress will reaffirm its commitment to our veterans by having the Clay Hunt SAV Act be the first piece of legislation that we send to the President for his signature and enactment into law.

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#### Quick Takes:

- **State of the Union:** The President delivered this annual address to Congress on Tuesday. This is the first time President Obama addressed a Republican controlled Congress. Unfortunately instead of indicating his intention to work together for the change the American people voted for, [he repeated his own agenda which we've heard from him before.](#)
- **Keystone Pipeline Floor Speech:** The Senate is debating the Keystone pipeline. I [delivered a floor speech](#) describing the economic impact it will have in Arkansas and encouraged my colleagues to approve construction of this project.
- **Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman:** I'm honored to be named chairman of the [Senate Appropriations Financial Services and General Government Subcommittee](#) and I look forward to leading efforts to cut wasteful government spending and holding federal agencies accountable for how they use taxpayer dollars.

- **Hire More Heroes Act:** I joined efforts to promote employment for our veterans while providing relief from the burdensome Obamacare employer mandate by cosponsoring the [Hire More Heroes Act](#). Similar legislation passed the House earlier this month.
- **Why is school choice important to you?:** I'm an original cosponsor of a resolution supporting National School Choice Week and I want you to share why school choice is important to you and your family. The National School Choice Week resolution designates the week of January 25 through January 31, 2015, as "National School Choice Week." During this week, I will feature stories and pictures submitted by Arkansans about the importance of school choice. [Click here to learn how to submit your story.](#)
- **Protecting Arkansas's Forestry Industry:** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is considering adding the northern long-eared bat to the endangered species list. This new classification could eliminate forest harvesting in Arkansas from April through September in order to protect the bat's habitat. That's why I urged the FWS Director to [minimize the economic impacts of this decision](#) in a letter with my colleagues.
- **General Aviation Caucus Co-chair:** This Congress I will serve as a co-chair of the Senate General Aviation Caucus. I look forward to working with Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV) to [promote the aviation industry](#) and its contributions to our economy and transportation system.
- **Internships:** My office is accepting applications for summer interns. Encourage college students who you know to [learn more about this opportunity here](#). The deadline to apply is March 10, 2015.
- **U.S. Senate Youth Program:** Congratulations to Katherine Sanders of Cave City and Ashton Yarbrough of Bentonville on being selected as the Arkansas delegates for the [53<sup>rd</sup> annual United States Senate Youth Program](#). These teens will join 102 other delegates in Washington to meet with Senators and other policy makers.

